

Sept. 15, '75.

Dear Mrs. Aye Min,

"There is this one way..."

"there is this one way, monks, for the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrows and griefs, for the going down of sufferings and miseries, for winning the right Path, for realizing nibbāna, that is to say, the four applications of mindfulness."

(Dīgha Nikāya II).

This is an answer to your letter how as to what is the proper way of living till attaining the niwanna: We need so many reminders for awareness (sati), and your letter is a lovely reminder for me; I have put it up in the room to see every day. Your question is well formulated, because there is a proper way of living to attain nibbana. And it is indeed a way of living, every day, not just thinking.

I sent you 2 other letters from Holland but I am not sure letters arrive in Burma and now, although it will take longer, I send you this one by way of our friend in New York.

I do not know whether you finished reading my two books and the Abhidhamma notes. Soon the Abhidhamma notes will be in print and then I will send you a copy, again by New York.

Awareness (sati, what is the word in Burmese?) is always awareness of something, of a characteristic of nāma or rūpa. Nāma is the reality which knows or experiences something, like seeing, hearing, thinking, rūpa is the reality which does not know anything, like visible object (colour), sound, smell, flavour, the rupas we can experience through bodysense:

hardness, softness, heat, cold, motion, pressure. Sati is nāma and it arises when there are conditions. We cannot focus sati on this or that object, otherwise there is the idea of self coming up again. The conditions for sati are: listening to the right person, considering realities, seeing the value of sati in one's life. There are namas and rupas all day and no need to do special things in order to focus sati, then it would not be the right kind of awareness. Concentrating on breathing is not samatha and the aim is different from vipassana. If you concentrate on breathing you become quiet, but nibbana is not attained in this way, because realities, different nāmas and rūpas are not realised as they are in that way.

When you are at your desk are there not heat, cold,

hardness, softness? Can they not be experienced now and then? If paññā (wisdom) realises the hardness when it appears as hardness, only a rūpa, not a self, right understanding is being developed. When touching a chair, we may think of chair, but that is only thinking of a concept chair. There is hardness which appears through the bodysense, just hardness. No chair in the hardness, no body in the hardness. There is also the experience of hardness, a nāma, and it can be known as it is. The experience of hardness is different from seeing, the experience of visible object. There is no person, not a self who experiences the hardness. When the experience of hardness appears it is just the experience of hardness. Thus there will be more detachment from the idea of self: self experiences hardness, self sees, self hears. No, they are only different nāmas, and little by little their differences can be experienced.

When you close your eyes and then open them there is a reality which was not there before: is there not seeing, experience of just visible object? It is different from thinking about what you see. And is there no colour, the visible object, that what appears just through the eyes? When we "see" chairs, people etc. it is not actually seeing, but again thinking of concepts. That kind of thinking is a nāma, different from seeing. And also that should be realised.

I was at the dentist and first tried to focus on R pressure when the dentist had to exert pressure on a tooth. Then I realised that there were many moments of thinking about realities but not awareness, but after that, when I did not try to focus (concentrate) there were so many different kinds of rupas all over the body: pressure now here, now there, and in that way one learns much more than when one tries to focus on a single rupa. It is clinging (tanha) which makes us desire for this or that nāma or rūpa.

The Four Applications of Mindfulness (Maha-satipatthana) is one way the Buddha wanted to show us that all kinds of nama and rupa can be the object of mindfulness. But, no need to think of any special order in which one should be aware. Mindfulness of the body: the body is right there, and it reminds us to be aware, since there are rupas all the time which can be experienced through the body-sense. There are feelings all the time, there are cittas all the time. Also the cittas of others are included. When we talk with people, there are many moments of unawareness. But we may notice the kusala cittas of or

akusala cittas of others and then we may be reminded of our own cittas and be aware. For instance, when others talk with dosa (aversion) about something unpleasant, we notice their dosa and it seems that this dosa is contagious. Very often we have dosa too. It may remind us to be aware of our dosa, but there is no rule, it depends on the sati. It may be that there is awareness of our thinking of the cittas of others, or it may be a rupa such as colour.

Sati should be very 'natural', and let us not put hindrances in its way by clinging to sati or trying to focus on special objects, or by our impatience. This is the proper way of living, leading to the niyanna.